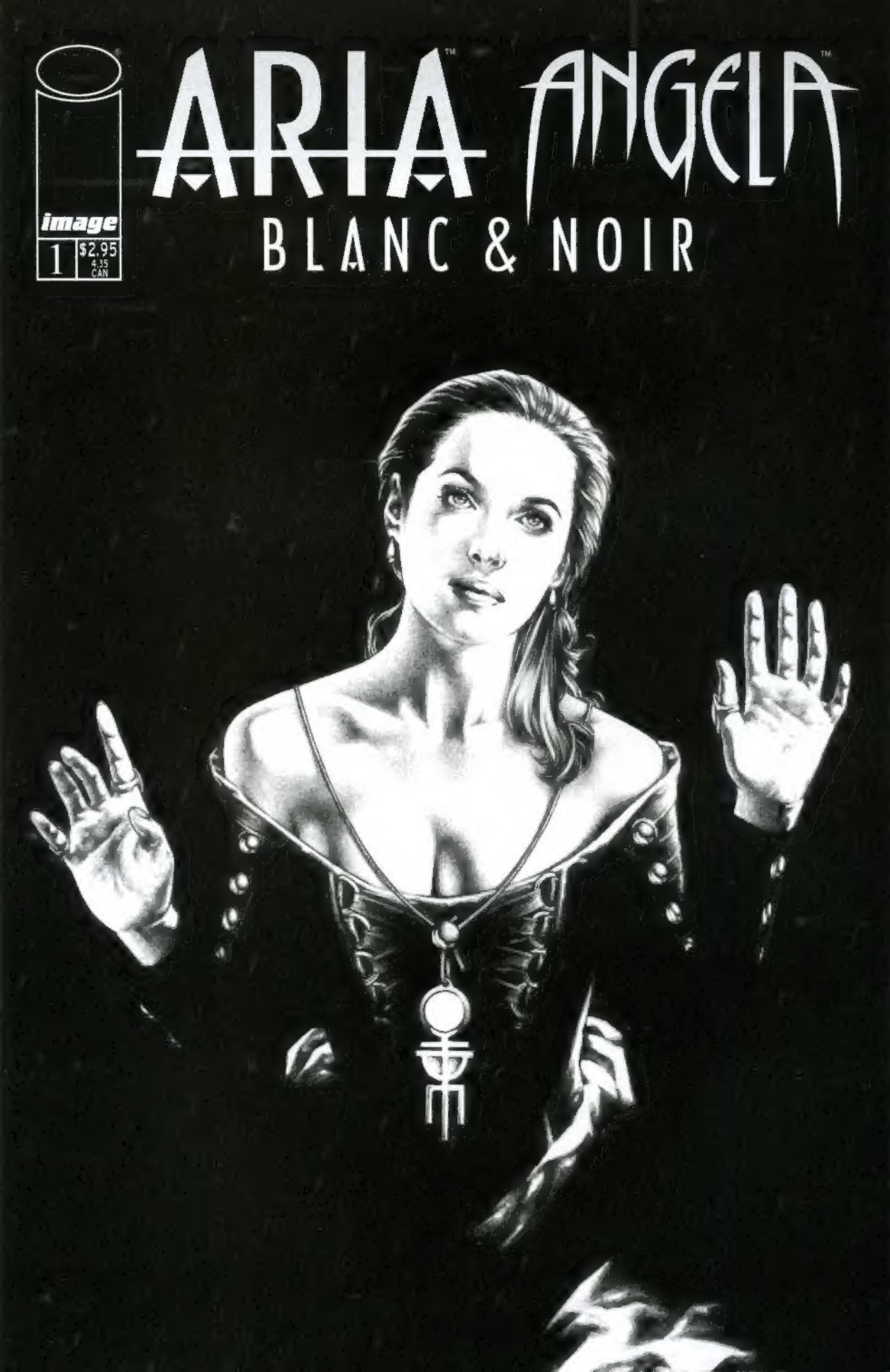
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Heavenly Creatures
Part 1 of 2

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The Age of Wonders

Looking back, of course, it truly was an age of wonders.
But then again, aren't they all?

To be English at the end of the 19th Century was to be a lord of creation, to play a part, no matter how humble, in the seizing and shaping of the world. It was an age of science, art and beauty, an age that worshipped reason, prized youth and honored justice. An age of bold discoveries and brave adventures. The age of Pan and Wonderland, the smart salon and "The Light of the World." Serpentine days and Wildean nights.

But it was also an era of cruelty, an age of extreme poverty and unspeakable horrors. The age of the workhouse and the gin mill, the "White Man's Burden" and Jack the Ripper.

In the middle of it all, Our Victoria sat like a fat spider, admiring the scale and dimension of her web. The British Empire reached hungrily across the globe, to Africa, India, Australia, North and South America... We lived with one unassailable goal: To make the world England. And we wouldn't be satisfied till penguins in Antarctica ceased their penguin business everyday at four o'clock sharp and drank a piping cup of Earl Grey from fine bone china.

Still, as the end of the century approached, there was a sense that things couldn't last. Prince Albert, the Royal Consort, had died many years earlier, and the whole of the empire was still draped in mourning clothes, fascinated with death and what lay beyond.

An earlier obsession with naturalism gave way to a mania for all things supernatural. Angels, faeries, ghosts and goblins, pookas, banshees, sprites and bogies, these things were suddenly discussed in the same sober tones as the theories of Darwin and Wallace. It wasn't enough anymore to catalogue every species of butterfly and swamp beetle. Learned men now began writing earnest papers concerning the dry weight of fairy wings, or describing the mating rituals of the Hertfordshire wood nymph.

It's funny how people never see what's in front of them. Looking for spirits in darkened parlors or in jars of swamp gas, they missed the genuine specimens that roamed right under their over-educated noses.

And of all the events of that wild, fecund era, to my mind, nothing can compare to the Adventure of the Fairy Princess and the Mad Angel, and the bloody trouble they almost loosed on the world.

Lady Kildare, princess of Faerie, heir of the House of Dannan, had made her home in the mundane realm for centuries, more comfortable in the common world than her mystic homeland. As for the Angel, well... how it came to be that her fate twined with ours, you are about to read.

Now that I am an old man, long in tooth and thin of coat, I remember those days with a fondness that they perhaps do not merit. Still, allow an old fool his illusions. For all its gruesome crimes, its misery and disease, for all the countless bones of innocents buried beneath the columns of empire, it was indeed an age of wonders, one which will never be seen again.

But then, aren't they all?

PRELUDE...
LET ME SING A FAIR DITTY 'BOUT POOR LONDON CITY. SHE'S A DOWAGER EMPRESS WIV' A SECOND HAND-CROWN.
SHE'S A VIOLET IN WILT, SHE'S A STRUMPET IN GILT. HIDES A THOUSAND DARK SECRETS IN THE FOLDS OF HER GOWN.
ONCE QUEEN OF FAIR MAY-DAYS, SHE'S NOW NOTHING BUT GREY DAYS SMOKING AND CHOKING ON SOOT BLACK AS SIN.
SHE'S A WITHERED OL' SPINSTER, FROM PALL MALL TO WESTMINSTER. HER GLORY DAYS PAWNED FOR A BOWLFUL'V GIN.
OLD DAYS OF LEGEND AND LORE, AND ENCHANTMENTS GALORE, LIKE A GHOST IN THE FOG BANKS, THEY'VE FADED AND GONE.
BUT IF YOU LOOK A BIT CLOSER, PAST THE END OF YOUR NOSE, SIR. YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED WOT YE STUMBLE UPON.
OH YES, YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED WOT YE STUMBLE UPON.
WHAT D'YE SAY, GUV? TRY YER LUCK?

LADY MORGAN'S MIDSUMMER'S BALL. THE MOST NOTORIOUS AND MOST POORLY KEPT SECRET OF THE LONDON SEASON. A FANCY-DRESS BACCHANAL FOR EVERY WELL-HEELED MISCREANT IN ENGLAND.
I WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED IT FOR THE WORLD.
YOU'D EXPECT THAT THE MINISTERS AND CLERGYMEN WOULD HAVE HAD IT SHUT DOWN LONG AGO. EXCEPT HALF OF THEM WERE IN ATTENDANCE.
DABBLERS AND DILETTANTES, CLOSET WARLOCKS AND HOLIDAY PAGANS.
ANY OLD FOOL WHO FANCIED HIMSELF TO HAVE A BIT OF MAGIC.
AND THEN, OF COURSE, THERE WAS A HANDFUL OF THE TRULY EXTRAORDINARY.

CREATURES SO RARE AND EXQUISITE, THAT MOST WOULDN'T DREAM THEY COULD WALK AMONG US.
NEXT THING, THEY'LL BE SAYING THOSE BRUTES CAN RULE THEMSELVES. UTTER ROT.
YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE MY HUSBAND. HE'S UNDER THE MISIMPRESSION THAT HE IS OCCASIONALLY RIGHT. I, ON THE OTHER HAND--
KILDARE! OVER HERE!
DARLING, I DIDN'T THINK YOU WOULD MAKE IT. WHEN DID YOU GET BACK FROM PARIS?
JUST LAST WEEK. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU. AND HOW ARE YOU, SIR ALEC?
IT'S BEEN A BEASTLY YEAR, I'M AFRAID. "ANNO HORRIBILIS," AS THE POETS SAY.
TAKE YER WRAP, MUM?
I HEARD ABOUT YOUR GRANDSONS. I'M VERY SORRY.
WELL, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO DANCE AGAINST THE DARKNESS, WON'T WE? RALLY OUR SPIRITS TO FEND OFF THE LONG SHADOWS...
OF COURSE WE WILL, ALEC.
IT'S WHAT WE DO BEST.

ENTERING THE GRAND SALON WAS LIKE STEPPING INTO A GREAT, GILDED SNUFF-BOX, THE AIR PERFUMED WITH OPIUM AND HOT-HOUSE ORCHIDS. A GLITTERING PANTOMIME OF POLITE DECADENCE, ALL APPETITES WHETTED IF NOT ENTIRELY SATISFIED. TEETERING ON THE EDGE OF THIS PARTICULAR FIN DE SIECLE, TO BE "MORALLY BOLD" SEEMED A MOST FASHIONABLE WAY TO RISE ABOVE NATURE.

IT ALWAYS MAKES ONE FEEL SO SUPERIOR TO IMAGINE ONESELF SIMPLY ABOVE COMMON MORALITY.

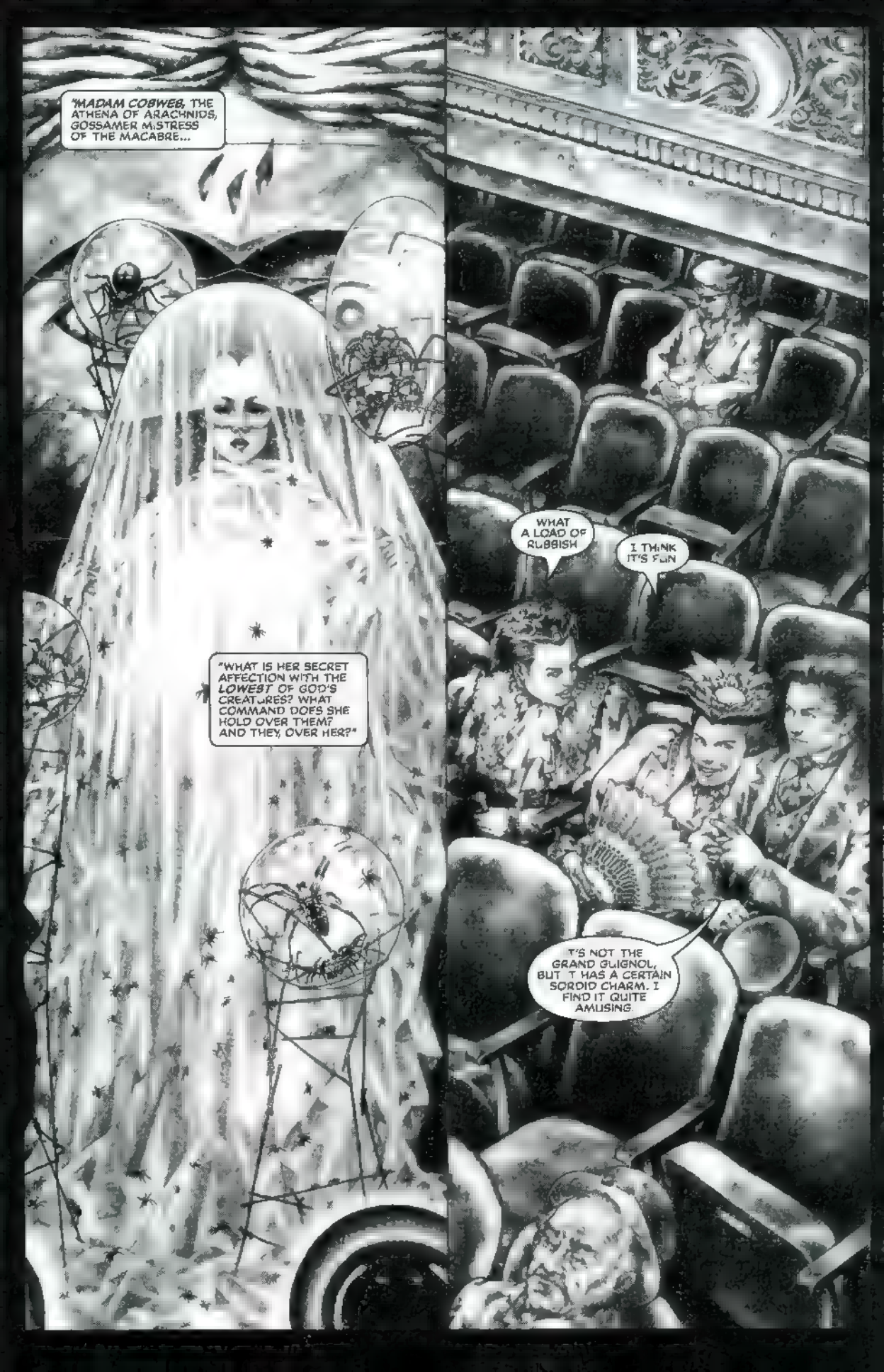
THERE THEY WERE, SUNDRY SCOUNDRELS, LIBERTINES OF EVERY STRIPE, GATHERED TOGETHER, CONVINCED THEIR CLUMSY GROPINGS WOULD SOMEHOW USHER IN THE RETURN OF PAN. BEHIND THEIR MASKS, THEY BLUSHED, LIKE NAUGHTY SCHOOL CHILDREN WHO THINK THEY'RE GETTING AWAY WITH SOMETHING.

"SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY, LIKE THE *NIGHT*, OF CLOUDLESS CLIMES AND *STARRY SKIES...*"
I ONCE DREAMED I WAS A CHINAMAN'S BUTTERFLY.
IT'S CALLED A "PLENARY INDULGENCE." ALL YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN *IN ADVANCE*. I CAN *SELL* YOU ONE...

ZEPHON, HOW ARE YOU, YOU OLD DOG?
BLOODY BORED.
WELL, THE NIGHT'S YOUNG.
OFF TO FIND SOME DULL, HANDSOME BOY TO BREAK UPON YOUR WHEEL, I SUPPOSE.
ONLY IF I'M LUCKY.
KILDARE WAS ALWAYS AMUSED BY THE SILLY GAMES OF MORTALS. BUT SHE LOVED OUR KIND, JUST THE SAME.
A GREAT, BLOODY ROMANTIC AT HEART. WORST THING FOR HER KIND.
LADY KILDARE... HOW IS YOUR MOTHER?
STILL DEAD, YOUR GRACE.
YES, OF COURSE.
KILDY! I WANT YOU T'MEET SOMEONE. THIS IS HENRI DE COURBIER. HE'S FRENCH! A PAINTER, HE IS. THE NEXT ROSSETTI.
WELL, I THINK WE COULD AIM A BIT HIGHER THAN THAT. PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.
I'M GOING TO MODEL FOR HIM.
ENCHANTÉ, MADEMOISELLE.

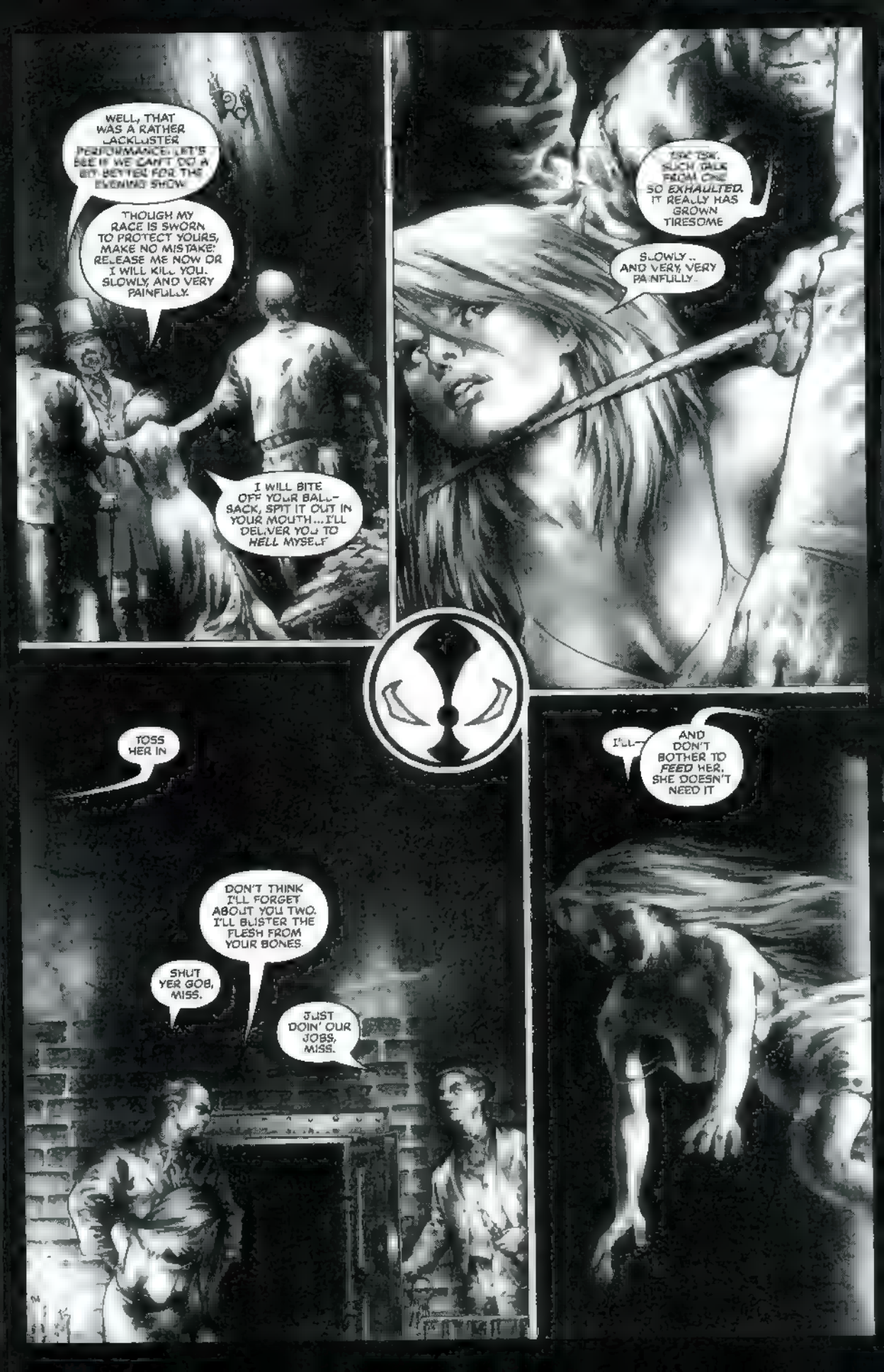
WHERE KILDARE DISAPPEARED TO THAT NIGHT, I CANNOT SAY. BUT LATER IN THE WEEK, SHE MET UP FOR A WALKABOUT WITH LISELLE AND HENRI.
LISELLE WAS A FORMER FLOWER GIRL. HOW SHE FELL IN WITH KILDARE'S CROWD I NEVER LEARNED. HENRI WAS AN INSUFFERABLE PRICK WHO YEARNED TO SEE THE "REAL" LONDON
I'M STILL SURPRISED KILDARE DIDN'T STUFF HIM DOWN A SEWER
YOU SEE, I HAVE THE "NOSTALGIE DA LA BOUE." I AM DRAWN TO SQUALOR AND DECAY.
THE BEAUTY OF THE COMMON MAN'S STRUGGLING WITH HIS LOT, IT IS... TRANSCENDENT TO ME
WELL, I'M SURE THE COMMON MAN MUST BE PLEASED TO BE SUCH A GREAT SERVICE TO YOU.
YOU HAVE T'SEE HIS DRAW'RNGS. HE'S UTTERLY BR LLIANT
DID YOU KNOW, KILDY ONCE POSED FOR MR. ROSSETTI?
IS THIS TRUE? YOU MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE YOUNG.
NOT EXACTLY. I'M... OLDER THAN I LOOK.
HOY-YAH, MISTAH! TAKE YER LOVES AND SEE SOMETHING WORTH SEEING!
WELL, ISN'T THIS A SH*T-HOLE? YOUR FRIEND CERTAINLY FOUND HIS "SQUALOR AND DECAY."
HUSH! IT'LL BE FUN
THRUPPENCE A HEAD, GUV. BETTER HURRY IF YOU WANT A GOOD SEAT.

--DR. PETER TRAUM, MAESTRO OF THE MYSTERIOUS, AT YOUR SERVICE
WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE IS A COLLECTION OF CURIOSITIES, CULLED FROM THE FARTHEST ENDS OF CREATION.
FROM THE SPICED DESERTS OF ARABY TO THE DARK WATERS OF THE CONGO, FROM THE WILD PLAINS OF THE AMERICAS TO THE VAST STEPPES OF THE URALS.
LADIES OF GENTLE TEMPERAMENT, AND THOSE WEAK OF HEART, MAY WANT TO SIT NEAR THE EXIT.
AND NOW, OUR FIRST EXHIBIT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY...
"DANTE, THE DACHAU DEVIL. HUMAN CANDLE AND MASTER OF PYROMANCY.
"IMPERVIOUS TO FLAMES, BOTH NATURAL AND UNNATURAL, HE BREATHES BRIMSTONE AND EATS COAL."


"MADAM COBWEB, THE ATHENA OF ARACHNIDS, GOSSAMER MISTRESS OF THE MACABRE...
"WHAT IS HER SECRET AFFECTION WITH THE LOWEST OF GOD'S CREATURES? WHAT COMMAND DOES SHE HOLD OVER THEM? AND THEY, OVER HER?"
WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH
I THINK IT'S FUN
IT'S NOT THE GRAND GUIGNOL, BUT IT HAS A CERTAIN SORDID CHARM. I FIND IT QUITE AMUSING.

AND NOW, FOR MY *LATEST* AND *GREATEST* ACQUISITION. A BEING WHOSE KIND IS FABLED THROUGH EVERY LAND ACROSS THE GLOBE...
CAST DOWN FROM BRIGHTEST HEAVEN, FOR TRESPASSES WE CANNOT IMAGINE. SHE IS POSSESSED OF UNSPEAKABLE *BEAUTY*, AND UNIMAGINED *POWER!*
PLEASE DIRECT YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION TO THE CENTER STAGE. I GUARANTEE YOU, YOU'VE NEVER WITNESSED THE LIKES OF THIS BEFORE!

SIGH NOT LIKELY.
ARE YOU TWO READY TO GO--
BLOODY HELL
MARK MY WORDS - I WILL DESTROY YOU FOR THIS.
BEHOLD! HEAVEN'S EXILE, THE CELESTIAL SIREN. I GIVE TO YOU THE FALLEN ANGEL!
AS HER TRUE NAME IS UNPRONOUNCEABLE TO THE MORTAL TONGUE, I SIMPLY CALL HER ANGELA!


WELL, THAT WAS A RATHER LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE. LET'S SEE IF WE CAN'T DO A BIT BETTER FOR THE EVENING SHOW.
THOUGH MY RACE IS SWORN TO PROTECT YOURS, MAKE NO MISTAKE: RELEASE ME NOW OR I WILL KILL YOU. SLOWLY, AND VERY PAINFULLY.
I WILL BITE OFF YOUR BALL-SACK, SPIT IT OUT IN YOUR MOUTH... I'LL DELIVER YOU TO HELL MYSELF
TSK TSK. SUCH TALK FROM ONE SO EXHAULTED. IT REALLY HAS GROWN TIRESOME
SLOWLY... AND VERY, VERY PAINFULLY...
TOSS HER IN.
DON'T THINK I'LL FORGET ABOUT YOU TWO. I'LL BLISTER THE FLESH FROM YOUR BONES.
SHUT YER GOB, MISS.
JUST DOIN' OUR JOBS, MISS.
I'LL—
AND DON'T BOTHER TO FEED HER. SHE DOESN'T NEED IT

I CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT SHE MUST HAVE FELT, THAT POOR CREATURE, LOCKED AWAY IN SOME DANK, DREARY CELL.
A ONCE PROUD WARRIOR OF HEAVEN, HUMBLED BY MORTAL MISCHIEF GOD'S CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT, LAID LOW BY GOD'S GREATEST BLUNDER.
I CAN PICTURE HER THERE, ANGER SEETHING IN THE DARKNESS, DREAMING OF ESCAPE...
THEIR PRIDE, YOU SEE, IS QUITE BEYOND OUR IMAGINING. SO TOO, IS THEIR VENGEANCE.

AS FOR OUR HUMBLE NARRATOR...
HE WAS TUCKED SAFELY AWAY AT HIS MANOR HOUSE
ENJOYING A SPOT OF EXERCISE...
AND A NICE WARM MEAL.

AFTER ALL, NOT EVERYONE'S LIFE CAN REVOLVE AROUND SECRETS AND INTRIGUE.
ARE YOU IN, SIR?
YES, HOPKINS. WHAT IS IT?
PARDON ME, BUT S R HAS A VISITOR. A LADY KILDARE
TELL HER I'LL BE RIGHT DOWN.

SIR WIL.. BE W TH YOU DIRECTLY, MADAM. WOULD YOU CARE FOR TEA WH LE YOU WAIT?
THANK YOU
LADY KILDARE, TO WHAT DO I OWE THIS MOST EXQUISITE PLEASURE? SOMETHING UGLY AND SCANDALOUS, I HOPE.
WILL THAT BE ALL, SIR?
YES, HOPKINS. THANK YOU.
SO AM I TO ASSUME YOU'VE FINALLY GIVEN IN TO MY CONSIDERABLE CHARMS?
SILLY BOY. I'M HARDLY YOUR *TYPE*.
HMM YOU KNOW, I CAN STILL SMELL BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS.
I'M SURE I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU MEAN BY THAT, DARLING.
NOW, SERIOUSLY. WHAT BRINGS YOU OUT HERE AT THIS HOUR?
INFORMATION. WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME, ZEPHON .
... ABOUT *ANGELS*?

I TOLD HER EVERYTHING I KNEW ON THE SUBJECT, WHICH I CONFESS WASN'T MUCH. I ALSO TOLD HER THAT WHATEVER WAS HAPPENING, IT WAS NONE OF HER BLOODY BUSINESS.
OF COURSE, SHE DIDN'T LISTEN TO ME
PETALS SWEET . AND FRAGRANCE DEEP .
EMBRACED IN VELVET WINGS OF SLEEP...
TIDES OF NIGHT... AND WAVES OF WONDER
FLOAT IN DEPTHS OF DREAMLESS SLUMBER

BY NOW, THE POOR ANGEL COULD FEEL THE HATE WELL UP LIKE BILE IN HER THROAT.
TO BE DISHONORED SO... PARADING HER HUMILIATION THRICE DAILY BEFORE THE MOTLEY RABBLE ...THEY WOULD ALL PAY DEARLY FOR THIS.
SHE WAS A SERAPHIC WARRIOR, ONE OF HEAVEN'S ELITE

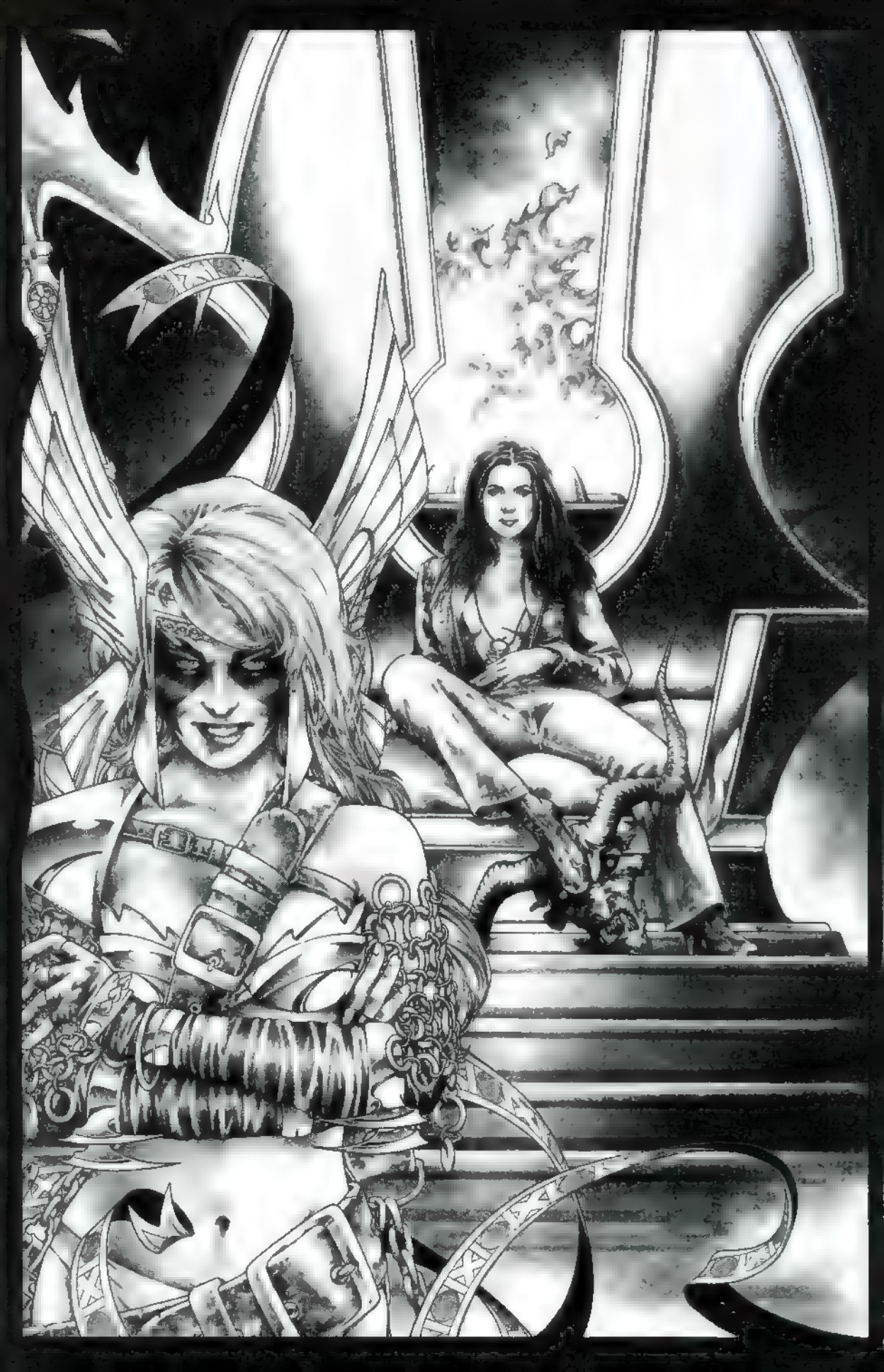
BORN TO HUNT HELLSPAWN DEMONS, TO SLAY MONSTROUS DRAGONS.
TILL ONE DAY, ON SOME DISTANT STAR, THE BATTLE GOES WRONG...
AND SHE COMES CRASHING DOWN TO EARTH LIKE A BURNING METEOR.
DAZED BUT UNHARMED, SHE LAY STILL IN THE LONG GRASS...
ONLY TO BE FOUND BY SOME WANDERING CHARLATAN...

TRAPPED, POWERLESS IN THE DARK, WONDERING HOW SHE COULD EVER ESCAPE...
PETALS SWEET...
TRUE, SHE COULD OUTLIVE HER MORTAL CAPTOR, WALK AWAY WHEN HIS FRAME TURNED TO DUST. BUT PATIENCE WAS HARDLY ONE OF HER VIRTUES.
TO BE RENDERED HELPLESS ..THAT WAS THE ONE INJURY SHE COULD NOT BEAR.
AND FRAGRANCE DEEP.
NO ONE EVEN KNOWS SHE'S THERE.
HELLO..

DON'T BE AFRAID. I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE
HELLO? ARE YOU IN HERE?
WHO THE *DEVIL* ARE YOU? TELL ME NOW BEFORE I POP YOUR HEAD OFF!
I AM CALLED *KILDARE*. I'M IMMORTAL LIKE YOU. I-I'VE COME TO HELP YOU

NO. YOU'RE NOT LIKE ME. YOU'RE—
SHIT.
WEL... WELL.. ISN'T TH S A COZY TWOSOME
TO BE CONTINUED

Cover Gallery



JLJONES
2008

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